



Linkages to Learning, a Collaborative School-based Partnership among the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Montgomery County Public Schools, Public and Nonprofit Agencies, Families and Communities

Linkages Grows

With the support of County Executive Doug Duncan and members of the County Council, Linkages to Learning is expanding to new school sites and is enhancing several existing programs. Weller Road and Wheaton Woods elementary schools are the latest schools targeted for Linkages services. The schools were selected according to student poverty indicators dictated by the Linkages to Learning expansion plan adopted by County government and MCPS in 1999.

The schools are currently staffed with site coordinators who are developing the program in partnership with their MCPS colleagues and with a case manager who is helping to address family needs. Later in the year, mental health counselors will join the new elementary teams. And with the opening of Loiederman MS, Linkages staff at Parkland Middle School have a new office in which to serve families from both schools through Parkland's renovation period.

Amy Christianson, clinical director of the Mental Health Association's Kensington Wheaton Youth Services, which provides Linkages social and mental services in the Wheaton area, observes: "It takes a bit of time to locate, renovate and furnish the offices, but in the meantime, the families in these communities as well as the school staff are able to learn about the program and meet their Linkages representatives."

At Gaithersburg ES, with the completed construction of the new School-based Health Center, a part-time nurse practitioner and physicians, a full time school nurse and school health room aide, along with a site coordinator and a case manager have now joined the existing Linkages mental health counselor. The comprehensive services added at the site include primary health care services for students and family support services. Additional funding was committed to enhance Linkages services at Summit Hall ES in Gaithersburg and Highland ES in Wheaton, enabling both of these "original" Linkages sites to have full-time site coordinators and case managers to better serve their respective communities.

Zrinka Tomic, manager of Child and Adolescent Services for the Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees and provides funding to Linkages nonprofit partner providers, notes: "In some years, state and local budget realities required us to take a step back from plans to expand services. This year, we feel very fortunate that we are able to meet the growing needs of so many more children in Montgomery County."

Kids First Alliance

The Gaithersburg Cluster is home to three new Linkages programs through the federally-funded *Safe Schools, Healthy Students* grant. Known as Montgomery County's "Kids First Alliance," the collaboration is led by MCPS. The grant aims to create an environment that supports healthy child development within a safe and caring community and provides the maximum opportunity for all children to learn.

Like the traditional Linkages model, the Kids First Alliance model provides coordinated prevention and intervention services, but adds resources for intensive intervention and crisis services. Washington Grove ES was Linkages' initial Kids First Alliance site, initiating services for families during the last school year. Forest Oak MS and Rosemont ES will come on board later this year, with mental health counselors and case managers offering services.

Continues on p. 4



New and veteran principals of Linkages schools joined with our partner agencies this fall to share ideas and learn from one another. L to R: Dr. Paul Scott of Linkages Resource Team; Jim Sweeney, Principal of Rosemont ES; Deann Collins, Acting Principal, Montgomery Knolls ES.

More news inside!

Empowering Families and Youth	2
Linkages to Literacy	3
Linkages Hometown Hero	4
Gaithersburg ES School Based Health Center	4
Thanks to Donors and Partners	5 & 6
Staff Updates; Enrichment Highlights	7
2005 School Supply Drive	8

Empowering Parents and Youth

This summer, Linkages to Learning joined with MCPS' Family and Community Partnership staff to offer **Conquista tus sueños** (Realize Your Dreams), a program aimed at empowering the Latino parent community, and **Opciones** (Options), a companion program geared towards Latino youth.

Alcira Colon, Linkages coordinator at Gaithersburg MS, recruited parents from her support groups to participate in the morning "Conquista" program. She organized an evening group to include Linkages parents from Silver Spring and from other area schools. Fernando Cruz-Villalba of the Hispanic Alliance of Montgomery County promoted the program, designed by educational consultant Carlos Devis to improve communication, parenting, personal goal setting, and family relationships.

"All the parents respond to Carlos," explains Colon, "Some of the mothers have made significant progress to address problems and improve their lives. But in our culture, parents often accept their family's circumstance without questioning. I think because of our relationship, the parents trusted me enough to make the commitment to attend this eight session course. Then Carlos provided the motivational spark to help them gather their courage to take the next steps."

Devis says, "I'm trying to help parents to get involved with their kids, to help them understand the power that they have to make a difference in their kids' lives. Most parents, they are just trying to make it through the day. And they don't want to make waves or call attention to themselves. For some parents, there is great shame also that they may be exposed, because they can't speak, read or write well. But there are resources and people who want to help them. So I'm trying to get them past the place where they say, "Well, I'm just a poor person. What do I have to offer others? I want them to know that they can make changes to help themselves, their children and their community too," said Devis.

Colon believes "many parents benefited from the Conquista program. Since the course, several parents enrolled in English classes. One mother is working on her GED, and another enrolled her children in summer courses offered at Montgomery College and George Washington University. The boost to their self-esteem was really incredible. One parent was just a semester away from receiving a degree at the College, and now she's finishing those classes."



L to R: Alberto Avedano, Editor-in-Chief of *El Tiempo Latino* newspaper, and Carlos Devis inspire parents.

Students Need Help Too

Many of the challenges facing parents also impact students. Observes Devis, "Adolescence is a difficult period regardless. But for many kids, they have moved around a lot, and so they haven't developed friendships. Many are very lonely, and language problems can contribute to their feeling of isolation." Devis notes that gangs have attracted many good kids who feel alone in our culture.

Linkages recruited students from middle and high schools throughout the County to join Devis' two day Opciones seminar at Gaithersburg MS. Colon said "We held this seminar in the gym and cafeteria, hired a professional DJ, provided food, door prizes, raffles, and arranged for guest speakers. The students enjoyed it a lot, and so did the parent volunteers."

Colon continues, "The program helps students develop an appreciation of themselves as worthy individuals and encourages them to actively participate in their own education. After taking the course, one student started a business mowing lawns. He took the money he had earned and he used it to help pay for the summer program he and his younger brother took, and he helped pay for his mom's courses too. He told me that you don't have to be an adult to start your own business."

According to Colon, the challenges facing the student made this achievement especially remarkable: "Last year, he had a lot of trouble with school, and his mother is disabled. Now he is an honor student. He put his anger aside and figured out that he could change his attitude, and now it's changed his whole life."

Concludes Devis, "I couldn't do this alone. The people at Linkages, they are the ones with a commitment to help. So many other efforts only focus on grades. But our society often forgets that for students to have good grades, we have to nurture them from the inside too."

"The program taught me to value myself as a person. I learned that I need to respect myself and not to allow others to put me down, I can only be a victim if I let them. That I cannot live in the past, to learn from those experiences but continue with my head looking straight ahead to my future." - L., Student

"These two days have taught me I can succeed. To continue dreaming and dream big. Nobody can take my dreams away, I will be persistent, it doesn't matter how many times I fall, I will get up and continue ahead. I cannot change other people but I can change my attitude. I can change the way I look at them and the things around me. I will become a leader, not a follower. Now my goals are clear and I will achieve those goals, I know where I want to be in 15 years." - P., Student

Family Literacy 2005

While many children and parents took a break from their bustling school-year schedule, Linkages families from eleven schools gathered to celebrate reading and learning.

"Linkages to Literacy" served 320 children and 150 adults in an effort to boost children's reading skills, promote family reading and familiarize Linkages' families with public library resources.

Linkages staff engaged MCPS and public library colleagues, community groups and volunteers to organize a number of activities at their schools and at seven branches of Montgomery County Public Libraries.

Children's librarians helped facilitate "library field trips" for families, sharing library resources and assisting them with library cards. Middle and high school students joined community members volunteering as "reading buddies," encouraging children to read.

This year, funding sources came from a 21st Century Learning Communities grant to MCPS, the City of Rockville, Interages, Provident Bank, private donors, Class Acts, and Linkages to Learning.

Many public and private agencies shared resources and speakers, and children received more than a thousand new books from First Book, Scholastic and other partners.

Inspiring young people and their families to focus on writing and reading during a period when music, TV and video games compete for their attention is a challenge for all families.

But for some Linkages parents who work long hours and lack the English skills to read to their children, finding the time and resources to promote family reading can be especially daunting.

To overcome these barriers, the Linkages to Literacy teams develop programs that engage families and capitalize on experiences familiar across cultures—making books and language appealing to students of all ages while helping families build literacy skills.

Broad Acres parents and their children learned conflict resolution skills following a reading of "Andrew's Angry Words" and on another evening shared myths from their cultures and created masks as they focused on issues of cultural identity.

Parents from the Greencastle and Banneker community joined together to discuss ways to "start the school year right" at their "Pajama Party" and shared ideas for positive family communication at their "Beach Party."

Police officers and other professionals made presentations about safety in several communities, and programs facilitated family togetherness through games, arts and crafts, cooking and fitness activities. At Harmony Hills and Viers Mill, parents and children became the actors as they retold fairytales and fables and enjoyed a masquerade ball.

Montgomery Knolls and Pinecrest families participated in a Through the Kitchen Door workshop and had fun at a special campfire program.

Families from Maryvale enjoyed "Backyard Theatre" performances at Strathmore and hosted volunteer readers from Interages. Parents from Harmony Hills, Viers Mill and Highland families enjoyed the multicultural stories of Noa Baum. Local author Lulu Delacre was greeted enthusiastically again this year at Highland ES, sharing stories from Latino cultures.

Linkages to Literacy

School and Library Sites:

Broad Acres ES
& Long Branch Library

Greencastle ES/Banneker MS
& Fairland Library

Maryvale ES & Twinbrook Library

Harmony Hills ES/Parkland MS
& Kensington Park Library

Viers Mill ES & Aspen Hill Library

Highland ES & Wheaton Library

Montgomery Knolls ES
Pinecrest ES, Eastern MS
& Silver Spring Library



Dovie Thomason shared traditional Lakota Sioux and Kiowa Apache stories.

"The Linkages to Literacy program has drawn families to the school, strengthening bonds between home and school."

-- Geoff Edgar, assistant principal
Eastern MS

"Reading Around the World" at Eastern Middle School

"Reading Around the World," Eastern Middle School's partnership with Class Acts, a local nonprofit, featured interactive performance with Latin American musicians, dancers from India, Chinese opera performers and a Native American storyteller.

Guest readers, including school administrators and teachers, helped connect families with the school.

Geoff Edgar, assistant principal of Eastern MS observes, "Families begin to realize the value of books and reading with their children. This is especially important for the families that Linkages brings to the school. Even when parents have challenges with language or limited education, the events feel welcoming and engaging."

To conclude the program, site coordinator Marlene Woods, arranged a field trip for families to the National Book Celebration on the Mall.

Said Woods, "Besides exposing our community to great literature and special activities, the parents learned to navigate Metro, helping them to connect with many cultural treasures in the District."

Our Hometown Hero

Kudos to Linkages site coordinator Ana Lugo Schmitz, selected as the September 2005 "Hometown Hero" by WETA. Recognized this fall at a special luncheon by WETA as well as at the Montgomery County Corporate Volunteer Council's (CVC) annual breakfast, Ana's "story" was aired on WETA (channel 26) through the month of September.

In making the award, WETA noted, "Ana Lugo Schmitz works in the vibrant and diverse community of Summit Hall Elementary School. The families of Summit Hall come from a variety of backgrounds. Many are learning English as a second language. Recognizing a need to offer special support to low income and immigrant students and parents, Schmitz has developed a comprehensive array of family support, literacy and education programs. Offered through Linkages to Learning, Schmitz's programs cover a range of topics from computer and ESL classes for parents, to tutoring and cultural classes for students. Schmitz makes the program accessible to parents by providing translations, child-care, snacks and flexible scheduling.

Programs such as the "Parents' Educational and Homework Club" and "Hispanic Mothers Educational Group" offer parents information and support in Spanish. These groups help parents to understand how the school system works and give advice on how to talk with teachers and become involved in school activities. Participants have developed lasting friendships through the programs, resulting in greater community support within neighborhoods."

At the CVC breakfast, Ilene Sparber of Linkages Resource Team said "Ana is a fabulous example of how we work with each community to strengthen families by developing creative partnerships. We are so proud of Ana and all of Linkages professionals for building their communities by engaging families and partners from the public, private and volunteer sector to deliver supportive and accessible services."



L: School community health nurse Carmen Alcaine monitors student's blood pressure at Linkages School-Based Health Center at Gaithersburg ES. R: Entrance to the new center.

"Based on our experience in other communities, we realize we can meet the health care needs of many of the area's uninsured children through the School-Based Health Center."

- Joan Glick,
Nurse administrator

Gaithersburg ES School Based Health Center Opens its Doors



Linkages third School-based Health Center opened its doors this fall at Gaithersburg Elementary School. Catholic University School of Nursing, Holy Cross Hospital and Children's National Medical Center join with GUIDE Youth Services and School Health Services to provide staffing for this exciting program.

Joan Glick, nurse administrator with School Health in the County's Department of Health & Human Services, notes "the School Based Health Centers at Broad Acres, Harmony Hills and Gaithersburg provide opportunities to address significant health risks facing children and families.

Since many families don't have transportation or the time to take their children to appointments away from their neighborhoods, the health staff is able to work closely with colleagues providing social and mental health services to meet multiple concerns."

Continued from p. 1



Thanks to our School Supply Donors



Boland Trane Air Conditioning, for donating school supplies to children at Parkland MS/Loiederman MS;

Foulger Pratt, for donating school supplies to children at Loiederman MS, Weller Road ES & Wheaton Woods ES;

The Institute for Genomic Research, for donating school supplies to children at Weller Road ES;

Educational Services Inc., for donating school supplies to children at Highland ES families;

Modell's of Bethesda, for donating dozens of backpacks to children at Loiederman MS, Weller Road and Wheaton Woods ES;

NIH National Library of Medicine, for donating school supplies to children at Rolling Terrace ES;

Rockville Chamber of Commerce and Office Depot of Rockville Pike, for donating hundreds of filled backpacks to children at Maryvale ES;

Target, for donating school supplies to children at Pinecrest ES & Montgomery Knolls ES;

The Church of Ascension, for donating 90 backpacks to children at Summit Hall ES;

Liberty Grove United Methodist Church, for donating school supplies to children at Greencastle ES & Banneker MS;

Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, for donating school supplies to children at Parkland MS & Loiederman MS;

Oak Chapel United Methodist Church, for donating school supplies to children at Parkland MS & Loiederman MS;

Olney Baptist Church, for donating school supplies to children at Harmony Hills ES;

St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, for donating school supplies for 72 children at Argyle MS;

St. Paul United Methodist Church, for donating school supplies to children at Fox Chapel ES;

St. Peter and St. Paul Antiochan Orthodox Church, for donating school supplies to children at Fox Chapel ES & Sally Ride ES;

The Tzu Chi Foundation, for donating school supplies to children at Silver Spring International MS & Eastern MS

Farmland PTA, for donating school supplies to children at Harmony Hills ES;

North Chevy Chase PTA, for donating school supplies and new books to children at Wheaton Woods;

Travilah ES, for donating 20 backpacks and \$1,500 to support Summit Hall ES's educational programs ;

Julius West MS, for donating school supplies to children from Kennedy Cluster schools;

Aspen Hill Co-op Nursery School, for donating school supplies to children at Harmony Hills ES & Wheaton Woods ES;

The Brownies of Olney, for donating school supplies and snacks to children at Linkages schools;

Community Donors and Stepping Stone Shelter, for donating 31 backpacks to children at Summit Hall ES;

Elizabeth Bacigalupo, for donating school supplies to children at Highland ES;

Susan Beram, for donating school supplies to children at Viers Mill ES;

Ann E. Lane, for donating school supplies to Highland ES families;



The Monitor Group, an investment firm based in Rockville collected school supplies for 30 students from Linkages new Weller Road ES site. L to R: Byron Diaz, case manager; Dr. Paul Scott, Linkages Resource Team; Emily Button, Americorps member; Christopher Cox and Amy Williard, managing members of The Monitor Group.

Mrs. Little, for donating school supplies to children at Parkland & Loiederman MS;

Margie Marple, for donating school supplies to children at Harmony Hills ES;

Seth Markowitz, for donating schools supplies to children at Harmony Hills ES;

Alice Neagin, for donating school supplies to children at Washington Grove ES;

Lynn Perry, for donating school supplies to children at Eastern MS;

Judy Rock, for donating school supplies to children at Weller Road ES;

Boyd Stewart, for donating school supplies to children at Gaithersburg MS and other Linkages schools;

Anna Tseng, for donating school supplies to children at Weller Road ES;





Thanks to our Donors and Community Partners



School Supply Donors to Children Linkages-wide:

- Long & Foster Rockville/King Farm
- Faith Fritz & colleagues at Marriott
- Learn Shop
- Ferris, Baker, & Watt
- Temple Beth Ami Nursery School
- Mom's Club of Olney Belmont
- Moshman Charitable Foundation
- Emmanuelle Acoustic
- Leah Anderson
- Thomas Chang
- Patricia Donnell
- Belinda Engels
- Kelly Horten
- Joanna Howard
- Terry LaClaine
- Donna Mathers
- Kendra Queen
- Martha Nguyen
- Sandy Ranno
- Abbadean Robert
- Richard Rodriguez
- Erin Rose
- Stella Sharif
- Ryan Spiegel
- Sondra Sumichrast
- Henry Whitney
- Lih Yang

Note: additional camp scholarship and school supply donors were acknowledged in the last newsletter. We apologize for inadvertent omissions. All of our donors and partners are very valuable to our families and communities!



Geoff Edgar, Eastern MS assistant principal and Ilene Sparber of Linkages to Learning Resource Team with Bill Schlossenberg of the Gazette. Schlossenberg, president of the **Corporate Volunteer Council**, presented checks to support camp scholarships for Linkages and a summer school program at Eastern MS. Funds were raised through concession sales at the Booz Allen Classic golf event.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Dougherty, for donating a complete bedroom set and other furniture to a Linkages family;

Mom's Club of Potomac, for a donation to help Linkages families;

Mom's Club of Rockville, for collecting diapers to help Linkages families;

Diana Huffman, for donating computer equipment to a Linkages family;

The Lux family, for donating bedroom furniture to Broad Acres families;

Robert Gifford, for donating furniture to Gaithersburg MS families;

The Kiwanis Club of Wheaton, for donating 4th of July baskets to Highland ES families;

Michelle Bernardi, for donating clothing and toys to Highland ES families;

Caryn Stein, for donating clothing to Highland ES families;

Judy Laurenson, for donating strollers and other children's items to Highland ES families;

Marta Orellana, for donating a carseat to a Highland ES family;

Anita Molina, for donating luggage to Highland ES families;

Tracey Walker, for donating an air-bed, bedding and clothing to Highland ES families

Elizabeth Vazquez, Paula Howard and Julia Vargas, for donating clothing to families at Oak View ES & New Hampshire Estates ES;

Julia Alkire and Emilie Crown, for coordinating a collection of baby items for Linkages families;

Marnie Grinspoon, for donating children's toys to Linkages families;

Marcie Lovett, for donating children's toys and clothing to Linkages families;

The Rockville Jaycees, for taking 16 children to Six Flag Amusement Park;

Child Center and Adult Services and its Camp Greenstart program, for scholarships for children from Summit Hall ES;

The Boys & Girls Club, for camp scholarships for a child from Fox Chapel ES;

City of Gaithersburg, for camp scholarships for children from Washington Grove ES;

Summit Hall ES, for scholarships for 64 children;

The City of Gaithersburg, for camp scholarships for 57 children from Summit Hall ES;

Dr. Michael Stern, for donating dental services to a Gaithersburg MS family;

Washington Tuskegee Alumni Club, for inviting children from Greencastle ES & Banneker MS to its scholarship breakfast.



A Warm Welcome to our New Site-based Staff and Interns:

Giselle Pautrat, case manager, Broad Acres

Diane Woods, student intern, Broad Acres

Maria Veizaga, student intern, Broad Acres

Tara Tozzi, student intern, Broad Acres

Wendy Quardado, student intern,
New Hampshire Estates/Oakview

Ricardo Padmore, case manager,
New Hampshire Estates/Oakview

Xiomara Pacheco Zarate, community service
aide, Gaithersburg ES

Luz Stella Lambert, case manager,
Gaithersburg ES

Carlos Aparicio, mental health counselor,
Summit Hall

Carmelita Naves, student intern, Summit Hall

Jennise Ramos, student intern, Summit Hall

Erica Tokar, Americorps volunteer

Peggy Bur, program manager, DHHS

Judith Jenik, site coordinator,
Veirs Mill/Harmony Hills

Beatrice Duval, case manager,
Greencastle/Banneker

Kimberly Powell, site coordinator,
Montgomery Knolls/Pinecrest

Valerie Graham, site coordinator, Weller Road

Debi Deutsch-Rios, director for Youth and
Family Services, YMCA

Alice Bird, school nurse, Wheaton Woods

Lisa Kowalewski, school nurse,
Loiederman and Weller Road

Mark Hodge, nurse manager,
Linkages School-Based Health Centers

Etusko White, school nurse, Rolling Terrace
ES, New Hampshire Estates/Oak View

Carmen Alcaine, school nurse,
Gaithersburg MS

Yida Beaty, school health room aide,
Gaithersburg ES

Laura Cooke, school nurse, Greencastle/
Banneker

Amanda Bobrow, mental health counselor,
Loiederman/Parkland

Yasmin Lluveras, mental health counselor,
Gaithersburg MS

...and a Fond Farewell to our Former Colleagues:

Amy Martinez, mental health counselor,
Eastern MS

Grace Campbell, case manager,
New Hampshire Estates and Oakview ES

Silvana Rossi, mental health counselor,
Summit Hall ES

Emily Button, Americorps Member

Sheilah O'Connor, program manager, DHHS

Julie Faden, mental health counselor,
Parkland MS



Enrichment Highlights

Clockwise: Dozens of Maryvale ES families enjoyed Big Train Baseball at Shirley Povich Field, sponsored by Trawick & Associates; Students from Gaithersburg MS (pictured) and Eastern MS participated in cooking and nutrition classes with Through the Kitchen Door, visiting Sodexo and celebrating their achievements; "Kicks for Kids" program brought hundreds of Linkages soccer fans to cheer D.C. United at RFK Stadium.





Douglas M. Duncan, County Executive
Montgomery County, Maryland

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Alternative formats available

Linkages 2005 School Supply Drive

Montgomery County residents rallied to prepare almost one thousand local children needing school supplies by donating backpacks, notebooks, paper, pencils, pens, paper, crayons, and more.

Hats off to all of our staff, community partners and volunteers for helping Linkages children get off to a good start this year!

L to R: Linkages staff and Americorps members gather supplies to distribute to children.

